Chapter I

THE COMMUNITY OF BANG CHAN

The Geographical Setting

In the populous flat central plain of Thailand where Bang Chan was located, fenceless geometric rice-fields, dotted by clumps of trees, stretch as far as the eye can see. Houses, clustering occasionally into hamlets, line the canals that serve for domestic use, drainage, irrigation, and communication. A few rounded-up roads lead out from Bangkok, the national capital on the Menam Chao Phraya, the great central river.

The monsoon divides the year into three seasons: a hot and wet (late May through November); a cool and dry (December to mid-February); and a hot and dry (late February to mid-May). The temperatures range annually from 58° to 89° F. (15° to 32° C.) with monthly means of 77° to 86° F. (25° to 30° C.) (de Young:5). A drop at night averages around 18° F. (10° C.) in April, and 22° F. (12° C.) in January, while the relative humidity varies between 65 per cent and 81 per cent (Hauck, et al.:12). Rainfall averages about 50 inches a year, 40 of which fall in the wet season (Janlekha:21). Because of the run-off from the mountains in the north, once a year the Menam Chao Phraya slowly rises, fills the canals and then overflows its banks, covering the plain for hundreds of miles to a depth of three feet or more. In Bang Chan, the water stood on the land from June until January, with its peak in October. From February to May the canals ran low, and the land dried and cracked from the intense heat.

The Community

In 1954, 1700 persons (336 families) lived in Bang Chan. Muslims, comprising 10 per cent of the population, lived as fully Thai citizens in all parts of the community in economic and social symbiosis with Buddhists. A few ethnic Chinese had married into Thai families and were accepted.

The community spread over an area of about 7000 rai (1000 hectares or 5 square miles). Bang Chan Canal bissected

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132 Bangkok. The tropical monsoon climate divides the year into three seasons, a hot, wet season from late May to November, a cooler, dry season from December to early February, and a hot, 361 dry season from late February to mid-May. The community, scattered over an area of approximately five square miles, was 161 composed of seven neighboring hamlets. In 1954, the population 162 was approximately 1700, divided among 336 households. About 60 per cent of the households were made up of independent families, parents with unmarried children, with an average family [463] size of 5.7 persons. The main occupation of 80 per cent of all families was rice farming.

243 The climate together with the overflowing Chao Phraya [13] river, provided natural conditions for raising a single crop [220] of wet rice. From May or June to February, the principal activities were those connected with rice production. This crop greatly exceeded the needs for local consumption as human food, [433] feed, and seed. The surplus of rice which was sold, was estimated for 1953 as 1.4 times the amount used for all purposes within the village (Janlekha, 1955).

346 Wat Bang Chan, the Buddhist monastery and place for re- 621 ligious exercises, was also the center of social life in the [795] community. When data for this study were being gathered, the one primary school in the village was located on the grounds of the wat. The community was defined simply by the clientele which patronized Wat Bang Chan and this elementary school. [563] Within the area of the community lived a small minority of Thai Moslems who patronized a mosque and school just outside Bang Chan. The few Chinese in the village were considered as part [028] of the Thai-Buddhist community. Information to be presented on food habits refers primarily to habits of the Buddhist majority, although some reference will be made to ways in which Moslem practices differed therefrom.

133 Although for six or more months of the year the fields 243 were covered with water, sometimes to a depth of a meter or 491 more, a year-round road, connecting Bangkok and Minburi, the nearest market town, ran through one edge of the village. Bus 484 service was available along this road, to either Bangkok or 487 [494] Minburi but within the community one went by boat on the network of canals during the wet season, and during the dry season, [503] on foot along the dikes or across fields. From late January through May, when subsidiary canals were apt to be dry, getting about was somewhat difficult. Boat travel was considered easy, but as many families had only one boat, a trip to the store or even to a neighbor's home had to be planned with reference to the activities of other family members.

443 Large scale purchases, as for a ceremony, were always made at a big market, but in general, instead of people going to the market-town, the "market" came to the people. Boat-venders brought not only fresh produce and staples but also sweets, ices, soft drinks, and cooked foods such as Chinese

arbitrary, were it not for the Buddhist temples, a neighboring government-operated primary school, and a few small stores, all of which provide a center for the community. There the inhabitants paddle their boats for religious observances, their children attend school, and anyone with a few minutes gossips over a cup of coffee. These people, furthermore, speak of themselves when outside the community as coming from Bang Chan, and the temple familiarly called "Wat Bang Chan" helps outsiders to identify the particular area. 361 621

The community's 1600 inhabitants live in one of seven hamlets, each with an officiating headman who may offer some leadership to the neighborhood. Bang Chan has no political unity beyond the informal influence of the head priest at the temple, for administrative units of local government disregard its social and psychological coherence. On one side of the main canal headmen go a rough two miles to attend meetings with the District Officer, while their neighbors across the canal must spend half a day on the canal to reach the district offices which govern them. 161 • 621 634 624

As the survey results indicate, about 88 per cent of the households receive the major portion of their income from cultivating rice, though many of these men and women turn briefly to other occupations during the slack season. The remaining fraction is divided between persons engaged in trade as storekeepers or vendors and those in such service occupations as highway labor or school janitor. 621 243 434 443 464

A little less than half of the population owns the land or a portion of the land it works, the remainder renting from neighbors and landholders living away from Bang Chan. Though land becomes scarcer every year and its subdivision into small plots finer, land problems and landlord problems are not important concerns of the area farmers. Economic factors also grant higher status within the community to land holders than to renters and the landless. So also age and religious piety bring respect. Yet social structure articulates flexibly enough to afford a young renter of good reputation and energy a decent hearing at a meeting, and indeed, he might carry his point in a group of wealthy landholders. Two or three times in past generations young men have moved from thatched houses in Bang Chan to high government positions in Bangkok through fortunate connections that enabled them to attend leading schools, as well as through their own industry. People morely invoke the Buddhist concept of accumulating merit in present and past lives through good deeds when they comment on the rise of such persons, for with sufficient merit all is possible. Thus regularity in the socio-economic order becomes a moderate level of probability admitting many exceptions. 423 427 554 621 [555] [771]

7: Janlekha X-4,5 (1948-1953)1956 AO7 Central Thai AO7
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CHAPTER II

THE COMMUNITY

Geography

131 The community of Bangchan is situated some twenty road-miles northeast of Bangkok in the heart of the economically all-important commercial rice growing area of central
361 Thailand. Surrounded by their rice fields, the population
• [161] of about 1,600 persons lives on some three hundred small
[503] family homesteads scattered along a half dozen connecting
*[243] canals. The community occupies an area of 6,500 rai,[1] or 2,600 acres, all of which, with the exception of about 300 rai of homesites and narrow strips bordering canals, is given over to the production of wet rice.

134 The soil of Bangchan area is heavy dark clay with
*243 an impervious layer at a depth of about six to eight inches and is suited only to rice growing.

133 The area is essentially flat, rising slightly toward
312 the north. It receives, in addition to rain water, irrigation water channeled into it through the Saen-saeb Canal one mile to the south, Samwa Canal one mile to the east, and Khlong-song Canal one mile to the north.[2]

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[804] 1. One rai is equal to two-fifths of an acre.

2. See map on page 162.

7: Janlekha X-4,5 (1948-1953)p956 AO7 Central Thai AO7
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Population

161 A census covering all households of the seven hamlets defined as constituting the Bangchan village was made during the late months of 1948 and the early months of 1949 and was finally corrected and established for May 23, 1949. On this date there were 1,582 persons residing in Bangchan.[5] In a subsequent census made in 1953, the population rose to 1,694, giving an increase of 112 persons during the four elapsing years. Table 1 shows that there was not only an increase in the total population but also in the average size of the family.

While figures in Table 1 indicate an annual compound rate of increase in population of 1.7 per cent and an annual compound rate of increase in the size of the family of 0.5 person, these annual rates should not be accepted at face
161 value. It was observed that population moved freely between
162 Bangchan and the bordering villages. The extent of migration to and from Bangkok is also quite large. Moreover, the size of the family depends on a number of factors, some of which are of temporary influence.

The preliminary study based on the village census of 1949 indicates that Bangchan was not troubled with a burgeoning population. According to that study, "Children

5. The population figure of 1,608 was reported by Lauriston Sharp, Hazel M. Hauck, Kamol Janlekha, and Robert B. Textor in "Siamese Rice Village -- A Preliminary Study of Bangchan, 1948-49." This new figure was arrived at after obvious errors such as duplications and omissions in the original census had been detected.

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 59]

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TABLE 1

POPULATION OF BANGCHAN IN 1949 AND 1953

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Hamlet	May 23, 1949 Families	Persons	May 23, 1953 Families	Persons	Increase Families	Persons
BC4	43	250	40	236	-3	-14
BC5	27	136	28	136	1	0
BC6	44	251	47	270	3	19
KY5	54	305	63	356	9	51
KY6	28	156	31	168	3	12
KY7	43	231	42	250	-1	19
KY8	49	253	47	278	-2	25
Total	288	1,582	298	1,694	10	112
Av. fam. size		5.5		5.7		0.2

7: Janlekha X-4,5 (1948-1953)p956 AO7 Central Thai AO7
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161 in the age group 0-4 years constituted 17 per cent of the
162 total Thailand population reported in 1937, yet this age group is only 10 per cent of the present /1949/ Bangchan population. The estimated crude annual birth rate -- 1/5 x children 0-4 years divided by total population x 1,000 -- is 20.3. This figure is slightly lower than the actual rate because infant mortality is not taken into account, but it may be compared with the following crude rates: Burma, 32.3; India, 33.0; Philippines, 32.4; United States, 17.9, all for 1939; and Federal Malay States, 39.7, for 1940. The Bangchan fertility ratio -- children 0-4 years divided by females 20-44 years multiplied by 1,000 -- is 620, actually less than the fertility ratio of 752 for the United States rural native white population in 1950."[6] This somewhat optimistic picture fades, however, in the light of the data of the 1953 census of the same population taken only four years later. From Table 2 the crude birth rate as of this later date may be estimated at 26.2, approaching those of prewar Burma, India and Philippines, while the fertility ratio has now become 779, a gain of 159 placing it higher than that of the 1950 United States rural native white population. These abrupt increases in the figures for birth rate and fertility ratio in themselves are not of much statistical significance, since the population is small and infant mortality and migration factors are not considered.

6. Lauriston Sharp, Hazel M. Hauck, Kamol Janlekha, and Robert B. Textor, Siamese Rice Village -- A Preliminary Study of Bangchan, 1948-49 (Bangkok: Aksoniti Printing Press, 1954), p. 25.

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434 amounted to somewhere around 5,000 baht, which was about
469 four times as much as the labor earnings of an average rice
621 farm operator as we shall see later.

178 The present occupational situation and accounts of
463 the changes in the past few years alone may not be enough to give us a complete picture of occupational development since the beginning of the history of Bangchan. Fourtunately, however, since settlement in the village in a considerable scale took place only some eighty years ago, evidence from genealogical studies has provided us with ample materials on which a reconstruction of the past development may be made.

[175] When Bangchan was being settled in the 1870's, as a probable consequence of the increasing national and international demand for rice and the revolutionary change in Thai society, every family was naturally a farm operator family. As long as there was land available for clearing, opportunity would be open for every new family, either branching off from the old ones or moving in from the outside, to operate a rice farm.

[161] Eventually, population grew up to a size large enough
[194] to support a temple in 1895. Population growth and the
[176] emergence of a village center at the temple prompted occupational specialization. At the beginning, investing, trading, professional servicing, and home enterprising probably took the forms of secondary occupations, while farm operating remained the primary occupation throughout. In time, these secondary occupations became more and more specialized and

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243 hypothesize that the presence of farm laborer families in
464 a rice growing village indicates a condition of land scar-
621 city. This is to be distinguished from the presence of farm
463 laborer families in intensive farming areas such as the truck gardening villages along the Damnegnsaduag Canal and plantation villages in Cholburi where the marginal product of labor, even with the same crude implement, is much higher than that in the non-intensive rice growing areas. Usually, there are farm laborers in any commercial rice growing region, but they consist of members of farm operator families with excess family workers who work for their own lampai. With low marginal product of labor, the demand for extra labor outside the family is not great and is highly seasonal in rice growing villages, resulting in extremely low total income for farm laborers. Piece-working is thus only good as a subsidiary income for an under-employed farm operator family, and certainly not as the main source of income for any family. Farm laborer families such as those existing in Bangchan are indigenous and are the outgrowth of competition for land coupled with the reluctance to emigrate on the part of those who failed to rent in any land. These people prefer to remain in the home village, willing to accept meager income from piece-work which is perhaps the only type of job they could get in the village, in the meantime trying to eke out as much as possible from what nature has to offer in the form of fish or uncultivated aquatic plants. The
[161] [178] abrupt rise of farm laborer families in Bangchan from nine

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per cent in 1949 to thirteen per cent in 1953 suggests that the problem of population pressure on land has become more acute, although it may also indicate changes in the cost structure of rice production which will be discussed in Chapter VI.

Concluding the discussion of this section, we may say that rice growing is the core of the occupational structure of Bangchan around which other occupations rotate. It is not uncommon that one family has several occupations, and in addition to income from these most families get "free" food in the forms of fish and uncultivated aquatic plants. This is the principal reason why families with apparently no cash income still thrive.

It is conceivable that in years of poor rice crop the family put more effort in the secondary occupations; when such an attempt does not work out well -- for example, no work for manual labor and no capital for trivial trade -- an effort is made to obtain subsistence directly from nature.

In any event, every family in the village is engaged in fishing in varying degree. It is because of this fact coupled with the fact that the village fish supply is decreasing that the problem of fish conservation is very important.

Finally, the dynamic nature of rice farming, with varying efforts on getting extra jobs and securing free food outside the farm depending upon the increase and decrease of the rice crop, suggests that the economy of any rice

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243 farm operators who hired regular laborers did so because
464 full utilization of the effort of all the family workers was not adequate. This assumption would seem to be reasonable in view of the rather high cost of hiring such laborers. It was concluded, then, that some farms in the community were below optimum size for the number of workers in the family.[11]

243 This condition of farm under-employment is our basic
464 assumption in discussing rent rates in Bangchan. With an
161 increase in population in an area where farm operating is
178 the core around which other less important occupations rotate, it may be reasoned that the aggregate demand for rice land in 1952 was at least as high as that in 1948 if not greater. As for the extent of under-employment of farm labor, it is interesting to note that the number of families directly engaged in rice farming, the farm operating and farm laboring families, was 256 in 1949 and 254 in 1953. With a constant supply of land (in the popular sense of the term), this more or less constant number of families directly engaged in rice farming indicated that the extent of farm under-employment in 1952 was just about the same as that in 1948. Although the average size of the family was found to be slightly smaller in 1953,[12] that slight decrease was certainly not large enough to materially affect the situation.

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11. Sharp et al., op. cit., p. 158.

[162] 12. The average size of the family was 5.7 in 1949, and 5.5 in 1953.

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*243 466 Difficulty arises when farm workers are classified individually because of duplication. It was mentioned in Chapter II that family members might work for their lampai after they had fulfilled their obligation on the family farm work. It is seen, then, that a family member may be considered as both family worker and piece-worker. Even the farm operator himself may earn extra income from piece-working and thus becomes also a piece-worker. In fact, most farm operators who had only a small area to work did have time to earn extra income this way. It is only the hired laborer that could not earn extra income from piece-working because he is bound by contract to devote all his time to his employer's farm and household work. It is considered unbecoming for a hired laborer to take time out, even at night, to fish for his own biological family.

Sampling Technique

*128 621 So far we have been dealing mostly with the universe of our study -- the total population of our "natural" Bangchan Village as defined in Chapter II; although occasionally, it might have been noticed, reference has been made to a sample of 104 farm operators and of 96 continuing farm operators.

[121] [161] Our primary attempt in this community study is to cover the entire village. It is obvious, however, that all relevant information cannot be gathered on some 300 families comprising this village of about 1,700 people. We may, for

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592 as it might seem to be, for there was a wide range of
464 ordination expenses and the family head naturally tended
792 to arrange one that was not so expensive unless it was for his own son. He might even arrange a joint ordination of
592 which the cost was much reduced. Moreover, most of the cost
464 of the ordination would be covered by the customary contributions made by neighbors. The lampai arrangement, which was nothing but a sophisticated term for wage, was a real concession on the part of the family head, indicating that he really wanted to keep the transient member in the family even at a certain cash expense.

464 The presence of transient family workers and their
592 relatively low remunerations indicated a condition of popu-
466 lation pressure onhand. Already, these people had adversely
• [167] affected the labering sector of the village economy because they represented an additional supply of cheap labor. Although they had contributed to a low cost of producing paddy and thus benefited the operators, with the rise of the price of foods which farmers had to buy and with the decline of free food (in the forms of fish and aquatic plants) transient family members may in time become a liability rather than an asset to the family. To be sure, when such a time has arrived, the family would be reluctant to admit a transient member. The trouble, however, is that the cost of maintaining an extra family member is implicit and not readily distinguished by the family. It would thus take some time before the real situation would be recognized.

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434 production method and farm organization remained the same throughout, there had arisen in the course of the past four or five years new items of consumption including wrist watches, fountain pens, hair do, Coco-cola, invitation cards, admission to Miss Thailand contest, etc., which demonstrate the operation of the principle of demonstration effect par excellence. It is not difficult to see, then, that any chance increase in cash incomes due to favorable weather and economic conditions tends to be absorbed in consumption.

While consumption correspondingly expands with an increase in income, it does not decline with a contraction of income -- at least not in the same proportion. This is the principal reason for farm poverty in rice growing areas where only a single-crop system is practiced and where fluctuation of crop yield is a normal phenomenon.

As a result, the excess of expenses over incomes
[426] tends to persist. High rates of interest also have made this excess greater and greater among those who fail to make proper adjustment in their credit situation. Thus, the less affluent farmers are not only poor but are actually getting poorer and poorer.

Population Pressure

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434 While low incomes and inherent excess of expenses over incomes are basic problems of Bangchan, discussions in the early chapters reveals that there are some factors contributing to the acuteness of the basic problems. One

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434 among these contributing factors is population pressure.

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161 Disguised unemployment in the case of farm operators
434 and their family workers and actual unemployment in case of
464 farm laborers indicates a condition of over-population in Bangchan in the sense that a certain part of its population can be removed without materially reducing total production in the area.

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226 In view of a continually decreasing supply of fish,
433 it may be said that the situation has reached the point where
262 it not only affects the per capita income of Bangchan residents but actually exerts pressure on means of subsistence. There are several indications of decreasing supply of fish and other marine animals in the village. First, it is the consensus of opinion gathered by our daily informal talk with villagers non of whom was found to hold a contrary view. Second, a passage in our 1948 log, "X is very lazy. Everybody here in Bangchan catches shrimps and makes his own shrimp paste. He alone does not catch shrimps even though he is among the poorest," indicates that purchase of shrimp paste was in 1948 an exception rather than a rule. In 1952, however, it was found that a total of 22.7 kilograms of shrimp paste consumed in a year by an average family, 6 kilograms, or more than a quarter, was purchased. In this latter year, 83 baht worth of fish and 54 baht of fish sauce were purchased by an average family in addition to shrimp paste as against negligible amounts for the same items in 1948 (we did not conduct a systematic consumption

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226 made that any program of fish raising in a closed pond, no
654 matter how effective it may be, should not preclude the need for conservation of fish naturally existing in the open canals.

243 It has been pointed out that Bangchan operators
226 produce 52 per cent of the things they need for ordinary
433 consumption. Thus, rice growing may be seen as a farming-
434 to-reduce-cost enterprise where maximization of profit ceases to be the primary motive of production. It has been pointed out also that rice growing is a losing concern to many operators (in terms of labor income and operator's labor earnings), but the loss has been compensated by the privilege to fish
[144] which is open to all village residents. Since the amount of fish caught constitutes the main and probably the only source of protein intake and at the same time a considerable share in the diet of villagers, continually decreasing supply of fish therefore underscores the immediate need for an effective program for fish conservation as a means to prevent the standard of living of the villagers from falling below the minimum level of subsistence.

161 Over-population in an area of limited job opportuni-
464 ties naturally creates an over supply of labor, which in
465 turn results in low wages. This is further complicated by a wide variation of individual earning from labor of from two thousand baht annually to almost nothing, the latter being the case of transient members of farm operating families.

*243 Finally, it has been pointed out that the kind of
• 161 training and the type of financial preparation given to young
178 married couples have served only to confirm Bangchan people
464 to their preference for rice cultivation. This together with limited job opportunities open to them elsewhere have tended to keep the villagers on the farms, and thus have tended to regenerate the condition of population pressure in Bangchan.

Lack of Effective Control and Regulationof Water Supply

*243 Another contributing factor is the lack of effective
458 control and regulation of water supply, which has caused annual fluctuation of rice crop. On the whole, this crop fluctuation is not as high as is the case in most of rice
[731] growing areas elsewhere. Famine certainly has not been known in Bangchan. Nevertheless, it is a certain sector of rice growers -- the marginal farmers with limited ability to adjust or with relatively little command over capital -- who are seriously affected by annual fluctuation of rice crop.

*243 When affluent farmers have a poor crop, their credit
426 purchase accounts may go up beyond the normal level, but they are usually in a position to clear this type of high interest bearing debts at the end of the business year by their net cash incomes or at least by securing loans with lower rates of interest to pay the accounts. On the other hand, marginal farmers are not in a position to seek low interest bearing loans. In case of crop failure, therefore,